



FRIENDS OF CONNECTICUT STATE PARKS, INC.
16 MERIDEN ROAD
ROCKFALL, CT 06481-2961
www.friendsctstateparks.org
March 2, 2015

Testimony HB6824 – Re: \$2,000,000 Budget reduction to Connecticut's State Park System

As President of the Friends of CT State Parks (FCSP), I am writing today to ask the Legislature to reverse the \$2,000,000 Budget cut to the CT State Park system. The State Parks have just completed the celebration of their Centennial, funded entirely with \$50,000 of private money raised by the volunteers from the Friends of Connecticut State Parks, a private, not-for-profit State Park support organization. Connecticut's State Parks generate more than \$1.6 billion dollars in revenue and taxes annually. They play a tremendous role in the state's Tourism Industry – drawing 8 million visitors through the gates each year on a year-round basis. A UCONN Economic Study demonstrated a return of \$38 for every \$1 spent on the State Parks. The State Parks' "No Child Left Inside" Program designed to get children and their parents outdoors and into nature, has become a national model, most recently adopted by the National Park Service to add excitement to their upcoming Centennial celebration.

Sadly, as the CT State Park system enters the first year of its next century, our prized assembly of 108 of the most cherished places in the state is facing devastating budget cuts, the loss of 2/3 of the seasonal work force, reduction of programs, a limited recreation season and, likely, closures. The DEEP and the 22 Friends support groups and their 6,900 members statewide have always put on a brave public face when it comes to the parks and their operation. In reality, the parks are at the lowest point in staffing in more than 40 years with appearance of the buildings and grounds being impacted. Parks are among the few affordable recreation options for economically disadvantaged families. Reducing services and safety in parks is particularly unfair to this segment of our state's population.

The Legislature and Administration has been generous in investing in new infrastructure in the parks recently, and that is a good thing. The rest of the story is that if there is no one to maintain new cabins, roads, and buildings, the investment will be for naught.

CT's State Parks are fortunate to have volunteers who devote countless hours to supporting the parks. Friends organizations have funded the construction of entire buildings, paid for public education programs, maintained grounds and trails, purchased equipment to help with maintenance and serve as constant advocates for these special places. Agency leaders, left with few options, often lean on volunteers to fill voids left by the departure of full-time employees. This reliance has become all too commonplace. Friends, many of whom range in age from late 60's to mid-80's, should never be considered as an offset to critically needed, skilled employees. Friends volunteer because they feel they are making a difference and, are helping the parks achieve things beyond what the budget can support. The 80,000 hours of time donated to the Parks by the Friends annually is valued at \$2.3 million. If the

current budget proposal is approved unaltered, there will not be enough seasonal staff to left to perform even the most basic minimal maintenance. I will predict that volunteers will no longer feel they are making a difference and, will leave the State Parks to find more fulfilling endeavors.

The CT State Park system has a proven track record of providing high value to the quality of life in Connecticut and has done the people of CT proud for 100 years. Please do not let this time be the last chapter in an exceptional State Parks story.

Pamela Aey Adams
President
Friends of Connecticut State Parks
860-537-3060
27 Harbor Road
Colchester, CT 06415